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SUBJECT: FOUR SHI'A POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS FORM COALITION
TO ADVOCATE FOR GREATER SHI'A RIGHTS

REF: KUWAIT 4451

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: LEADERS OF FOUR LOCAL SHI'A POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS ANNOUNCED OCTOBER 23 THE FORMATION OF A SHI'A UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION, THE NATIONAL SOCIETIES COALITION (NSC), TO ADVOCATE FOR GREATER SHI'A RIGHTS AND TO COORDINATE EFFORTS IN THE 2007 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. TWO OF THE FIVE SHI'A MPS CURRENTLY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THE NEW COALITION: MP SALEH ASHOUR AND MP DR. YOUSEF AL-ZALZALEH. IRONICALLY, THE NATIONAL ISLAMIC ALLIANCE (NIA), A CONSERVATIVE SHIA ASSOCIATION REPUTED TO HAVE CLOSE TIES TO IRAN, REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NSC ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE COALITION WAS TOO SECTARIAN. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) AT AN OFFICIAL PRESS CONFERENCE HELD OCTOBER 23, LEADERS OF FOUR SHI'A POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS -- SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PEACE AND JUSTICE GATHERING (PJG) ABDUL HUSSEIN AL-SULTAN, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SHI'A CLERICS GATHERING (SCG) SAYED MOHAMMED BAQER AL-MOHRI, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL CHARTER GROUP (NCG) ABDUL HADI AL-SALEH, AND SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ISLAMIC NATIONAL CONSENSUS MOVEMENT (INCM) DR. NIZAR MULLA-JOMA -- ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL SOCIETIES COALITION (NSC). THE NSC WILL SERVE AS AN UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION TO COORDINATE THE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE FOUR SEPARATE GROUPS.

3. (SBU) THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE NSC ARE TO PROMOTE "POLITICAL REFORM, AMENDMENT OF THE ELECTORAL DISTRICTS, THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY SYSTEM, THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES, EDUCATIONAL REFORM, REFRESHING THE LOCAL ECONOMY, DEVELOPING THE MEDIA, REVEALING THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY, AND ACTIVATING THE ROLE OF THE KUWAITI WOMEN," THE DAILY STAR QUOTED NSC TREASURER DHARI AL-SHAMALI AS SAYING. THE COALITION WILL ALSO COORDINATE EFFORTS BETWEEN THE FOUR GROUPS IN THE 2007 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS TO INCREASE THE CHANCES OF SHI'A CANDIDATES BEING ELECTED. (NOTE: THERE ARE CURRENTLY FIVE MPS IN THE 50-MEMBER NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FROM KUWAIT'S MINORITY SHI'A, WHO REPRESENT APPROXIMATELY A THIRD OF KUWAIT'S POPULATION. END NOTE.)

4. (SBU) NSC DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL DR. ABDEL WAHED AL-KHALFAN EMPHASIZED THAT THE COALITION IS "NOT A SECTARIAN GROUP" AND WILL "OPERATE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE KUWAITI CONSTITUTION AND ITS LAWS," BUT ADDED THAT "WE HAVE OUR ISSUES REGARDING SECTARIAN DISCRIMINATION IN GOVERNMENT POSTS AND PLACES OF WORSHIP," LOCAL PRESS REPORTED. NSC SECRETARY GENERAL ABDUL HUSSEIN AL-SULTAN TOLD LOCAL PRESS THAT PROMOTING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES WILL BE ONE OF THE MAIN GOALS OF THE COALITION. HE ADDED THAT "THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY WITHOUT THE EXISTENCE

OF POLITICAL PARTIES."

15. (SBU) SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SCG SAYED MOHAMMED BAQER AL-MOHRI TOLD POLOFF OCTOBER 24 THAT THE KUWAITI GOVERNMENT REACTED FAVORABLY TO THE FORMATION OF THE NSC SINCE THE GROUPS INVOLVED HAVE A REPUTATION FOR MODERATION. AL-MOHRI DISMISSED LOCAL PRESS REPORTS SUGGESTING THE FORMATION OF THE COALITION WAS INFLUENCED BY EVENTS IN IRAQ, SAYING THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS THE CULMINATION OF TWO YEARS OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE GROUPS. HE ADDED THAT A SHI'A ASSOCIATION ASSOCIATED WITH THE IMAM SADEQ MOSQUE ALSO PARTICIPATED IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AS AN "OBSERVER," BUT DID NOT OFFICIALLY JOIN THE COALITION. ASKED WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE SHIA POPULATION THE COALITION REPRESENTED, AL-MOHRI SAID SPECIFIC FIGURES WERE DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE SINCE MOST POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS HAVE A LIMITED MEMBERSHIP THAT DOES NOT REFLECT THEIR BROADER PUBLIC SUPPORT.

16. (SBU) HOLDING KEY POSITIONS IN THE COALITION ARE SECRETARY GENERAL ABDUL HUSSEIN AL-SULTAN (PJG), DEPUTY

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SECRETARY GENERAL DR. ABDEL WAHID AL-KHALFAN (PJG), SECRETARY

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SHAIBA BIN SHAIBA (INCM), AND TREASURER DHARI AL-SHAMALI. MEMBERS OF THE ORGANIZATION ALSO INCLUDE DR. ABD AL-SAMIAA BEHBEHANI, AL-SAYED REDA AL-TABTABAEI (NCG), SHAYKH AHMED HUSSEIN (SCG), NAGY QALLAF (SCG), AND SHABIH BIN SHABIH (INCM).

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